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What is the value of rooting a history of the Holocaust in the longer history of colonialism and racism?

The transition from religious intolerance to racial anti-Semitism during the 18th and 19th centuries, spurred by nascent ideas of nationalism, Social Darwinism, and colonial mentality, laid the ideological groundwork for the Nazi regime's genocidal policies and dehumanizing practices towards Jews. By integrating the Holocaust into the broader narrative of colonialism and racism, we can better comprehend how Jews were perceived as fundamentally different from non-Jews, and how Germany's colonial past informed their policies towards the perceived national security threat presented by the Jewish population.

Previously, the hostility towards Jews by Christians was rooted solely in religious difference, allowing Jews potential acceptance into Christian society through conversion. This dynamic was upended with the advent of racial theory, a concept inflamed by nationalistic beliefs and the need to justify the harsh fallout of imperialism. Consequently, European states started to self-identify as nations distinguished by unique characteristics. Guided by nationalism, social scientists posited that distinct biological traits determined social characteristics and, in turn, societal order (Sarah Stein, "Racism, Colonialism, Anti-Semitism," 2023). The concepts of Social Darwinism, born from Darwin's writings, and racial superiority provided colonizers with a rationale to commit genocide. This led to the framing of Jews as fundamentally and unchangeably different from non-Jews due to biological differences, marking the transition from Judeophobia to anti-Semitism (Bergen 14). As a result, religious conversion became an impractical solution for Jews in Germany, where they were deemed socially disruptive due to their inherent biological differences.

While Social Darwinism and rising antisemitic beliefs justified genocide, the colonial mindset and strategies used during Germany's colonial expansion significantly shaped the Nazi regime's occupation policies in Eastern Europe and their treatment of Jews. The practice of viewing resistance as illegitimate and proactively targeting civilians mirrored colonial strategies used in subduing rebellious tribes (Moses 76). German Jews were targeted for extermination by the Nazis because of their perceived dominance in Germany and Eastern European Jews due to their perceived potential for colonization. Concurrently, Hitler saw Germans as colonizers and Jews as an inferior race, unfit for Germany's future (Moses 77). Fused with escalating antisemitic ideas, these notions propelled the Nazis to resort to genocide or overwork as solutions to the Jewish question, given their biological differences superseded any theological ones. Hence, understanding the shift from religious intolerance to racial anti-Semitism underscores the impact of nationalist and Social Darwinist ideologies, as well as Germany's colonial mindset, on the Nazi policies. It also underscores the vital role these ideologies played in shaping the Nazis' genocidal stance towards Jews, highlighting the necessity of examining these ideological shifts to fully understand the Holocaust's horrifying scale.

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How important was anti-Semitism to the original goals of the Nazi party, as stated in "The Program of the National Socialist (Nazi) German Workers' Party"?

In the "Program of the National Socialist (Nazi) German Workers' Party," anti-Semitism emerges as a central pillar underpinning all of the Nazi Party's objectives. It explicitly surfaces in the goals like the union of Germans, citizenship exclusive to those of German blood, and restrictions on non-German immigration. However, it also subtly pervades other aspirations, such as the call to annul the Treaty of Versailles, address population surplus, and exercise state control over education, press, and religion, all infused with anti-Semitic undertones. Thus, anti-Semitism was central to most of the Nazi Party's goals, shaping their vision of a pure German state and a secure living space for Germans.

Firstly, anti-Semitism facilitated the Nazi Party's aim of forging a German People's Community. The Program championed the unification of all Germans, defining citizenship by bloodline, and explicitly excluding Jews. This stance established anti-Semitism as the backbone of German nationalism, defining Germanness and non-Germanness based on race. Furthermore, the Program's insistence on combating those undermining the common good and restructuring the educational system and the press hints at anti-Semitic stereotypes. By covertly linking the societal harm to Jews and proposing an overhaul of sectors where Jews were prominently represented, the program subtly advances its anti-Semitic agenda. Its endorsement of 'positive Christianity' and opposition to the 'Jewish-materialistic spirit' exemplifies the shift from Judeophobia to anti-Semitism, highlighting a chasm between Jews and Germans that could no longer be overcome by religious conversion.

Anti-Semitism also underpinned the Nazi Party's goal of securing a living space for Germans. The Program, in its pursuit of a living space exclusively for Germans, explicitly

excludes "non-Citizens" from residing in Germany, holding office, or benefiting from state-provided employment opportunities. Such "non-Citizens" were primarily Jews, and these policies thereby sought to ensure a homogeneous German society. The term “non-Citizens” itself serves to marginalize the Jewish community and other minority groups, fortifying anti-Semitic views while legitimizing the Party's repressive policies. The Program also covertly invokes anti-Semitism by leveraging the “Stab in the Back” theory, which blames Jews for Germany's World War I defeat. For instance, the Program demands the annulment of the Treaty of Versailles and the expulsion of all “non-Germans” who arrived after August 2, 1914, the onset of Germany's participation in the war. These directives not only contest the Treaty's terms but also indirectly implicate Jews in Germany's defeat and its punitive aftermath. The date specified, August 2, 1914, is significant as it marked the start of Germany's involvement in World War I. By explicitly linking the expulsion of "non-Germans" to this date, the Nazi Party was implicitly blaming these groups, particularly Jews, for Germany's defeat and the subsequent harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Therefore, the centrality of anti-Semitism to the Nazi Party's original goals, as articulated in their program, is clear; it was not only explicit in their policies but was also the underpinning sentiment driving their vision for a homogeneously German state and a secure living space.

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Sarah Stein,"Racism, Colonialism, Anti-Semitism," HIST 5 (lecture, UCLA, 2023)